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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the practice of successful urban teachers, exploring the validity of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) urban teacher assessments. Results from a literature review and empirical evidence indicate that successful teaching occurs when teachers and students share background and cultural experiences. Teachers who understand students' cultural attributes more readily link classroom content with student experience. Successful teachers emphasize the whole child and know their students' cultural norms. Culturally relevant teachers make demands for academic success for all students rather than making assumptions about at-risk students. They work deliberately to blur the borders between themselves and their students and help students develop counter knowledge that challenges the status quo. The NBPTS adopted a model of assessment that includes both portfolio and assessment center exercises. Currently, characteristics outlined in this paper are not well represented in NBPTS Early Adolescent/English Language Arts assessment. NBPTS assessments have been found to have an adverse impact with respect to race. In the case of INTASC, the use of assessment is quite limited, and the number of urban teachers taking the assessment has not been made available to researchers. (Contains 29 references.) (SM)

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The Validity of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)/Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Assessments for Effective Urban Teachers

Findings and Implications for Assessments

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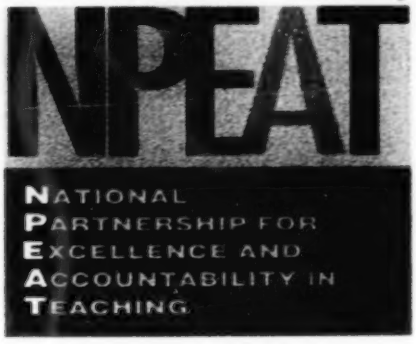

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Findings and Implications for Assessments

Background

This project examines the practice of successful urban teachers, and in the process explores the validity of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment Consortium (INTASC) assessments for urban teachers. The project focuses on these two assessments because they exemplify two major standards and policy initiatives to improve teaching and learning and are expected to become widely used in the profession.

Research Questions

The research design and methodology deliverable (3/30/98) and the assessment and data collection instruments and protocols deliverable (7/30/98) identified the following research questions

that guide this inquiry:

1. What aspects of teaching, that are important to student learning, may be differentially valued and represented in the repertoires of teachers in urban, minority communities as compared to those in other teaching contexts?

2. To what extent are these aspects of teaching well-represented and well-measured in new teaching assessments developed by NBPTS and INTASC?

3. Are there ways in which new teaching assessments disadvantage urban and minority teachers?

4. What aspects of new teaching assessments best showcase the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of urban teachers?

5. Are there ways in which alterations in the assessments might better represent the practice of urban and minority teachers?

To date, we have conducted a review of the research literature that assists us in answering the first three questions of our inquiry. However, in this Option Year 1 study, we are just beginning to collect empirical evidence to help us answer questions 4 and 5.

Preliminary Findings

The growth of knowledge and information about teachers and teaching has been exponential. From Lee Shulman's (1987) oft cited Harvard Educational Review article to myriad books, journals, articles and chapters about teachers, teacher knowledge, and teaching, we have become hypersensitive to the role of the teacher and teaching in improving student achievement. However, much of the literature that we now have on teaching focuses on generic notions of what teachers need to do to be successful. This attempt to codify and regularize teaching has culminated in forms of assessment that we now say identify "good teaching." Unfortunately, teachers who are teaching the nation's neediest students are rarely included in these new definitions of exemplary practice. The work of this project is not to refute the salience of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) as rubrics for understanding practice, but rather to look at expanded paradigms of practice that include additional knowledge, skills, and dispositions for successful urban teaching.

Research by Delpit (1995), Foster (1994; 1995), Irvine (1990), King (1991), Ladson-Billings (1994; 1995), Moll (1988), and Garcia (1988) suggests that there are some aspects of teaching

important to student learning that may be differentially valued and represented in the repertoires of successful teachers in urban, minority contexts.

Foster's (1994; 1995) work identifies cultural solidarity, linking classroom content to students' experiences, a focus on the whole child, a use of familiar cultural patterns, and the incorporation of culturally compatible communication patterns as key elements of success in teaching African American urban students.

Irvine's (1990) work has investigated the nested conditions of urban school teaching that require what she terms A cultural "synchronization" in order to produce successful teaching (and learning) in urban school contexts. Among the variables in her model of successful urban teaching are: societal context, institutional context, interpersonal contexts of students and teachers, and teacher and student expectations.

Ladson-Billings' (1994; 1995) research on successful teachers of African American children found that there is a consensus around how such teachers conceptualize themselves and others (i.e., students, parents, community members), how they conceptualize social relations (both within and outside of the school and classroom), and how they conceptualize knowledge.

Garcia's (1988) work suggests that Latino students benefit from teachers who specify task outcomes and what students must do to accomplish tasks competently, communicate both high expectations and a sense of efficacy about their own ability to teach, exhibit a use of "active teaching," communicate clearly, obtain and maintain students' engagement, monitor students' progress and provide immediate feedback.

Anderson (1991) and others have argued that teachers who understand and apply Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) are likely to experience success in teaching. This zone is a theoretical place where new skills are learned and organized. If we aim teaching at that place where students already are wholly competent, then the work will be too easy and students do not really learn anything new. If we aim teaching at the point that is far too advanced, then students become frustrated and also do not learn anything new. The ZPD becomes the "soft spot" (Anderson, p. 206) where learning can be maximized. The question that work on Vygotskian theory leaves us with is, what is the role of student sociocultural background in delineating their ZPD and how do

teachers differentially access that zone? Do successful teachers of urban students pull upon cultural resources to both determine and teach in the ZPD?

Foster's work (1994; 1995) and Ladson-Billings' work (1994; 1995) have been more useful for the purposes of this project because they look at specific teacher beliefs and actions, which are essentially all we will have access to in the process of our work. We are mindful of the need to factor in school and social context variables, however, the current way that the NBPTS and INTASC assessments are constructed relies largely on teacher performances.

Below we go into greater detail of Foster's and Ladson-Billings' categories and suggest how they may be useful for our ongoing work:

Cultural solidarity: Foster (1995, p. 575) argues that although "similar background does not guarantee productive, fluid, or uncomplicated relationships between teacher and student," (Mahiri, 1998) there is evidence that suggests that some of the more successful teaching occurs when teachers do share background and experiences with students (Cazden, 1976; 1988). Siddle-Walker (1993) has demonstrated that a sense of cultural solidarity or connectedness has existed historically, particularly during the era when African Americans were consigned to segregated schools.

The focus on "relationship" in urban schools is particularly important given that urban schools have regularly been described as places where children experience little trust and sense of safety with the adults in the school (Haberman, 1995). But how is a sense of caring and cultural solidarity exhibited in an assessment? What words, gestures, pieces of evidence can be collected that demonstrate the connection between a teacher and her students? In the cases of both Foster and Ladson-Billings, long-term, on-site observations and interviews were used to document this quality. However, nothing in the proposed assessments directly deals with the relationships between teachers and their students. Those relationships are assumed but rarely are documented.

Linking classroom content with student experience: This attribute often relies on how well the previous category (cultural solidarity) is established. The teacher who feels comfortable and has something in common with the students, their community, their language, and their backgrounds has at her disposal a deep reservoir of skills and abilities upon which to draw. For instance, the teacher

who attends a church in the community or has had a church experience similar to that of the children can more readily make analogues between appropriate behavior at particular times in the school day and appropriate behavior in particular portions of a worship service. These are not necessarily special skills, for indeed we would expect all teachers to be able to provide students with real world example, but the skills and examples that urban teachers may have can be so familiar to students that their use minimizes conflict and confusion. Ladson-Billings and Henry (1991) in a look at both African American and Afro-Caribbean Canadian youngsters and their teachers demonstrated how the teachers' understanding of the specific situations of students allowed them to better manage and teach in classrooms considered difficult by their peers.

Focus on the whole child: Foster (1995) points out that successful teachers of African American children typically concern themselves with much more than the children's cognitive growth. Issues of moral, ethical, and personal development are a part of their pedagogy. However, the proposed standards-driven assessments for teachers focus primarily on student achievement in specific content areas. The relationship between personal, moral, and ethical growth and cognitive growth has not been clearly established, but successful teachers in urban areas seem to believe this more holistic approach to teaching is key to their success.

Use of familiar cultural patterns: Successful urban teachers know (or quickly learn) the cultural norms and patterns of their students. In Ladson-Billings'(1994) study, teachers describe the ways they used cultural knowledge and/or learned from students in order to facilitate the relationship that would subsequently facilitate learning. Rather than attempt to re-socialize students into a dominant paradigm, successful urban teachers soon learn that qualities such as reciprocity, respect, collectivity, and expressive individualism are vital to being able to work with their students. Foster (1995) asserts that routines and rituals are prevalent in the classrooms of African American teachers who are successful with African American students. These cultural patterns mirror aspects of African American life experiences in music, art, dance, religion, speech, and other forms of communication.

Incorporation of culturally compatible communication patterns: The area of culturally compatible communication patterns has received the most attention in the research literature.

Sociolinguists such as Cazden and Leggett (1981), Erickson and Mohatt (1982), Mohatt and Erickson (1981), Philips (1983), Au (1980), Au and Jordan (1981), and Jordan (1985) all have devoted considerable research time to examining the interactions between teachers and students who are from different linguistic, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.

Ladson-Billings' (1994; 1995) work uses a related but different rubric by which to assess effective teaching. In a 3-year study of effective teachers of African American students, she was able to discern a set of general principles that characterize such teachers, which she calls culturally relevant teaching:

Conceptions of self/other: Culturally relevant teaching constructs a vision of the teacher and student as capable, efficacious human beings. Rather than succumb to the prevailing beliefs about "at-riskness," culturally relevant teachers make demands for academic success from all students. These teachers, like Kleinfeld's (1974) "warm demanders" did not allow students to avoid work because they were poor or came from single parent households, or had some other personal/social problems. Sometimes these demands for success can appear harsh. Certainly, a snapshot of the teachers in the classroom (such as those that appear in some assessment exercises) may be a distortion of what the teachers actually are trying to accomplish.

Conceptions of social relations: In many urban classrooms there is a strict line of demarcation between students and teachers. In fact, some have likened urban schools to prisons with the students as inmates. However, culturally relevant teachers work to deliberately blur the borders between themselves and their students. The erasing of the borders is not acquiescence to a notion that children and adults are peers. Instead, it is an attempt to erase the distance that exists between and among teachers, students, parents, and the community. To an outside viewer this changed set of social relations might appear as if teachers are overstepping their legal authority. A teacher might speak specifically about a student and his parents. On the surface, this interaction may be interpreted as the teacher behaving inappropriately. However, what may lie beneath the surface is a carefully constructed set of social relations which the teacher has worked out with the student's parents that allows for a degree of informality.

Additionally, culturally relevant teachers work to stretch the boundaries of the classroom so

that they extend out into the community. Such teachers may attend students' church services, sporting events, and secure personal goods and services from local merchants and business people to make sure that they are a visible presence in the community.

Conceptions of knowledge: Culturally relevant teachers take as a given the notion that the curriculum is not working in the best interest of urban, poor children of color. Consequently, these teachers help students to develop counter knowledge that challenges the status quo. This subversive strategy is not likely to show up in an assessment because most such teachers are unlikely to share this strategy publicly. In the classrooms of culturally relevant teachers knowledge is often very tentatively held because students are charged with the responsibility of deconstructing, reconstructing, and constructing knowledge (Shujaa, 1994). From what we have seen of the new assessments, knowledge construction has been more narrowly defined than what the research on effective teachers in urban settings demonstrates.

What We Know about the New Assessments and Urban Teachers

The NBPTS adopted a model of assessment that included both portfolio and assessment center exercises, in part, because traditional teacher tests have come under sharp criticism from most teachers. Multiple choice tests fail to assess the complexities of actual teaching practices and cannot provide assurances as to what teachers actually do in the classroom. However, the 1994-95 EA/ELA assessment produced a shocking result of no teachers of color achieving Board Certification. Below we describe the elements of that assessment.

The NBPTS assessment for the 1994-95 Early Adolescent/English Language Arts (EA/ELA) assessment certificate consisted of a total of nine exercises, three of which were completed at the teacher's school site and six at the assessment center. The nine exercises of the 1994-95 EA/ELA include:

School Site Portfolio: The School Site Portfolio asks teachers to provide information about their professional activities and to complete the Student Learning Exercise (SLE), the Post-Reading Interpretive Discussion Exercise (PRIDE), and Planning and Teaching Exercise (PTE). These exercises require candidates to provide artifacts from their classrooms (i.e., videotapes, student work,

and handouts) and to write reflective commentaries in response to specific questions about their practice.

Assessment Center Exercises: Teachers respond in writing to three situations and complete a content knowledge examination consisting of three 2-hour essays. In the Teaching Literature exercise teachers participate in a discussion with three or four other teachers as a prefatory exercise for preparing a written justification for which four out of eight novels they would include in a list of readings for young adolescents. The Instructional Analysis exercise requires teachers to prepare a written analysis of another teacher's videotaped instruction and accompanying commentary, explaining their analysis and making recommendations for how the teacher might improve her practice. In Analysis of Student Writing, teachers analyze the writing of ten students and discuss possible instructional lessons they might design for the students. The Content Knowledge Examination probes the teachers' knowledge of composition, literature, language, and language development in three 2-hour expository writing tasks. Readings are provided as stimuli for each task. Text Selection requires candidates to consider material for inclusion in an anthology for early adolescent readers. In Theory of Response to Literature, teachers read an article, summarize key issues, and relate the author's theory to their own teaching experience and professional knowledge. The Language Variation exercise requires candidates to read expositions about language variation and apply them to teaching early adolescents.

We will be using the 1996-97 EA/ELA which includes:[11]

Portfolio Exercises

Analysis of student response to literature

Analysis of student writing

Instructional Analysis (Small group)

Instructional Analysis (Whole class discussion)

Documented Accomplishments I and II

Assessment Center Exercises

Teaching Literature

Teaching and Writing

Language Study

Selecting Texts

We believe that the changes that were made in the 1996-97 assessment may help improve pass rates, but still may result in adverse impact for urban teachers of color. As we examine the assessment we conclude that the characteristics outlined earlier (from Foster and Ladson-Billings) are not well represented in the current NBPTS EA/ELA assessment. While there may be some overlap with Ladson-Billings' criterion of knowledge construction and Foster's criterion of communicative compatibility, in general the characteristics of effective urban teachers do not map neatly on to the NBPTS EA/ELA assessment.

To date, NBPTS assessments have been found to have adverse impact with respect to race. According to measurement professionals, adverse impact is distinct from bias in that adverse impact exists if the rates at which members of a distinct group (e.g., women, African Americans, non-English speakers) pass the assessment at significantly lower rates than White examinees. The reasons for differential certification rates are not relevant to the determination of adverse impact. Differential certification rates may result from any number of potential biases: biases in the conceptualization of the domain to be assessed, biases assessors bring to scoring, characteristics of the scoring scheme that disadvantage specific groups of examinees, differential access to professional, technical, or collegial help in preparing portfolio materials.

According to Bond (n.d.) the exercises in an assessment may exhibit adverse impact and yet be free of the above mentioned deficiencies. Differential certification rates may not be traceable to any flaws in the assessment system itself, but may represent genuine average differences in the knowledge, skills, or abilities being assessed. The mere presence of adverse impact does not tell us what factors are operating.

An assessment is said to exhibit bias if significant, systematic differences in performance among subgroups in the teacher candidate population can be ascribed to actual flaws or deficiencies in one or more aspects of the assessment system itself that have the effect of disadvantaging members of a specific group.

Bond and Linn (1994) and Jaeger (1995) have conducted analyses of adverse impact on the NBPTS 1994-95 EA/ELA assessment and found substantial adverse impact by race. Of the 47 African American EA/ELA candidates, five or 11% have achieved NBPTS certification. By contrast, 127 of the 309 White teachers in the field test or 41% have achieved NBPTS certification. The researchers have not, as of yet, determined that the assessments are biased.

In the case of INTASC, the use of the assessment is quite limited and the number of urban teachers taking the assessment has not been made available to the principal investigators. However, issues of adverse impact are possible in the INTASC assessment also.

What We Still Need to Know

The major aspect of our work is now underway. We have begun identifying sites and potential expert teacher candidates in Milwaukee, Detroit, Minneapolis, and possibly Chicago. Our site selection was amended to conform to our budget constraints. Our original sites were to include North Carolina and California because of the level of NBPTS activity in both those states. INTASC work will continue to be conducted in Connecticut because of the investment the state certification entity has with INTASC.

As we pursue answers to questions 4 and 5 (re: the aspects of the new assessments that best showcase the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of urban teachers and possible alterations of the assessments), we are looking at an ambitious research agenda that is likely to generate between 30 and 45 hours of audiotape and 20-30 hours of videotape. Additionally, we expect that the combination of field notes, interview data, and portfolio data will provide us with a wealth of information with which to answer these remaining questions and perhaps rethink the first three questions.

Constraints

Most research projects are more ambitious on paper than they are in the field. In our case, as mentioned earlier, we had to restrict our sample to conform to the realities of our budget. However, we are no less confident in our ability to advance this project and produce important findings for policy makers, assessment constructors, teachers, administrators, and ultimately students and their families. We want to be certain that new forms of assessment work to help identify and reward those

teachers who serve all children well.

A second constraint we faced was the timing of the award. With our late start and the very cyclical nature of the school calendar, we found ourselves "out of sync" with schools and teachers last year. This year, with a full academic year ahead of us and a clear sense of our budget, we are able to move ahead with our empirical work. We are confident that by the end of this academic year we will be able to share with colleagues at NBPTS and INTASC findings that will be useful in helping them improve their assessments.

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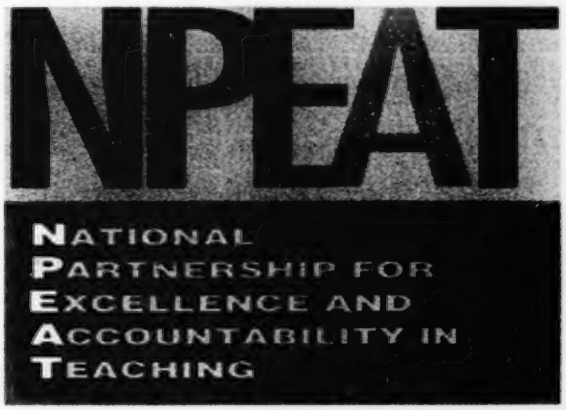

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[1] We described these exercises in detail in the July 1998 deliverable on Assessment and Data Collection Instruments and Protocols.

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